

RAILROAD RESERVATION

Birmingham Industrial District

Bordered by 21st, 19th, Powell and Morris Streets

Birmingham

Jefferson County

Alabama

HAER No. AL-57

HAER
ALA
37-BIRM,
40-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

National Park Service

Department of the Interior

P.O. Box 37127

Washington, DC 20013-7127

RAILROAD RESERVATION

HAER No. AL-57

Birmingham Industrial District

Bounded by 38th St. on the E., 16th St.

on the W., First Ave. on the N., & First
Ave. on the S.

Birmingham

Jefferson County

Alabama

HAER
ALA
37. BIRM,
40-

ADDENDUM TO

RAILROAD RESERVATION

Birmingham Industrial District

Twenty-first to Nineteenth Sts.,

Powell to Norris Sts.

Birmingham

Jefferson County

Alabama

WRITTEN HISTORICAL & DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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ADDENDUM TO
RAILROAD RESERVATION

HAER
ALA
37-BIRM,
40-

HAER No. AL-57

Location: Bounded by 38th Street on the east and 16th Street on the west and extending from First Avenue on the North to First Avenue on the south, Birmingham, Jefferson County, Alabama. Please note change of address is more inclusive than address of HAER No. AL-57 documentation previously transmitted to the Library of Congress.

Date of Construction: 1871-1950s

Engineer: William Barker

Project Information: This report is based upon written documentation donated by the Birmingham Historical Society, reformatted to HABS/HAER guidelines.

Significance: The beginning of city planning in Birmingham, the Railroad Reservation symbolized the centrality of the railroad to the District, forming the main artery of transportation into the early city and its surrounding manufacturing centers.

Description: Significant buildings in the Railroad Reservation include the Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark, the Alabama Power Company-Powell Avenue Power Station (1895, 1906, 19th Street and Powell Avenue), the Seaboard Railroad Freight Office & Depot/Alagasco Building (1905, 30-20th Street), the Transportation Building (1928, 22nd St. at First Avenue); the Morris Avenue portions of the Morris Avenue and First Avenue Historic District, numerous concrete and steel viaducts and underpasses including the Rainbow Viaduct (1919, at 21st Street) and the Art Deco styled 20th and 19th Street Underpasses (1931); and the L. & N. Station (1952) which replaced the original Union Station of the 1880s. Since the 1960s, railroads have demolished structures associated with rail use creating large areas of vacant land within the reservation.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The major and most clearly articulated feature of the Elyton Land Company's 1871 plan for the City of Birmingham is the "Reservation for Railroad and Mechanical Uses." As documented in surveyor William Barker's records and the land company's Minute Books, the intent was to use this central portion of the city grid to bring in and service railroad and industrial uses. By the late 1880s, iron-producing furnaces and rolling mills, railroad stations (both passenger and freight) and shops and yards filled the designated area. The company had succeeded in launching the South's largest industrial center. Elyton Land Company officers withheld some of the original "Railroad Reservation" lots along Morris Avenue for warehouse developments, many of which the directors built and operated. These form today's Morris Avenue and First Avenue National Register Historic District. After the turn of the century, as railroad shops and yards grew in size and usage, they relocated to the north, east and west of the city. Areas of former rail use were redeveloped with the warehouses along First Avenue North now in the Downtown Birmingham Theater and Retail District. The current series of overpasses and viaducts were built from 1918 through the early 1930s.

Sources Consulted

Birmingham Historical Society-Auburn University Urban Design Studio, Railroad Reservation Project Files, 1991

Elyton Land Company, Minute Books, 1871 and 1872, Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and History.